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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR
HANS URSTAD, HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION TO SERBIA

1. Post is authorized to present the following statement at the February 28, 2008 Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.

Begin text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you as well, Ambassador Urstad, for your excellent and well-balanced report.

As you have noted, Serbia has had to deal with a number of challenges since your appearance before us last March.

While these challenges have slowed the pace of reform, we agree that Serbia still appears to be committed to following the path of democratic and economic reform. We are pleased that the relationship between your Mission and the Serbian government and civil society remains constructive. Your strong leadership and the meaningful work of you and your staff are important elements of this success.

The United States is pleased that police reform remains a key Mission priority. The Mission continues to do excellent work in helping the Serbian police fight organized crime and instill community policing principles, particularly in multi-ethnic areas.

We welcome the close cooperation your Mission enjoys with the Ministry of Justice and the assistance you are providing to Serbian authorities in developing legislation to combat organized crime. Likewise, we welcome the work of the Mission in the field of domestic war crimes prosecutions; in particular, support for public outreach efforts and trial monitoring.

We also congratulate you for the solid relationship the Mission has established with the Ministry of Culture and the fine work you are doing to help build accountability and transparency among Serbia's print and broadcast media.

The Mission's efforts to develop the efficiency and oversight capacities of key parliamentary committees are also of particular value, as are your endeavors to promote parliamentary outreach and transparency.

Finally, Ambassador Urstad, the United States would like to emphasize once again our very strong support for the work the Mission is doing to build security and stability in southern Serbia and, more recently, in Sandzak/Raska.

This brings me to my last point. Over the years, Ambassador Urstad, the United States has made a point of praising the cooperative and productive relationship that exists between your Mission and the Serbian government.

Our impression, however, is that certain Ministries in the Serbian government, notably the Ministry of Interior, could

do much more to facilitate the Mission,s work. In short, Mr. Chairman, while the OSCE, through its field presences, can help develop capacity, at the end of the day it is up to the host country to provide equal opportunity to all of its citizens.

Once again, we would like to commend you and your team for all of the excellent work the mission has done.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

End text.

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